

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

David Harrison (Chairman)
Marian Spain (Deputy Chairman)
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre
Richard Frampton
Edward Heron
Mel Kendal
Neville Penman
John Sanger

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Julia Mutlow	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management & Learning
Nigel Stone	Chief Finance Officer
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Holger Schiller	Partnerships and Community Officer
Jo Murphy	Information and Data Protection Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 No apologies for absence were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest, however Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre informed Members that he was no longer a trustee of the Ninth Centenary Trust which was the reason that he was not declaring an interest on this occasion.

3. Chairman's announcements

3.1 The Chairman welcomed Mel Kendal to the Committee, and was reminded that he had previously served on this Committee in his previous term as an Authority member.

3.2 The Chairman introduced Patrick Heneghan who had recently been appointed to the Authority by the Secretary of State and was present at the meeting to observe proceedings.

4. Minutes

- 4.1 The Chairman asked officers for an update on the two action points at minute item 144.5. David Stone informed the Committee that the Members' Day regarding monitoring water courses had been diarised for the spring, when the weather would be better and the ground conditions drier; the other Members' Day on Grant Funding had been arranged for 11 October 2017. The information regarding numbers of people trained in traditional building skills had been circulated by email to Committee members in July.
- 4.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

6. Annual Audit Letter

- 6.1 Nigel Stone reminded the Committee that the Annual Audit Letter was a summary of all the papers and discussions which had taken place throughout the year regarding the audit work.
- 6.2 The Chairman stated that it was an excellent audit result and asked that the Committee's appreciation be passed to the team.

Resolved, that the Ernst and Young Annual Audit Letter be accepted on behalf of the Authority.

Voting: None voting against

7. First Quarter Progress Report 2017-18

- 7.1 David Stone introduced the report (NFNPA RAPC 340/17) which comprised first quarter progress against the actions in the 2017/18 Work Programme being the last of the annual programmes under the 2015-2018 Business Plan. Officers were working on a new Business Plan for 2018-2021 and regular updates on progress would be made to the Committee.
- 7.2 He said that the report also contained first quarter progress against the key performance indicators, both national and local. Referring to the indicator measuring members' participation at meetings, he said that the figure was currently above the target set for the year and this was expected to continue with the recent appointment of local authority, parish and Secretary of State members to vacancies on the Authority.
- 7.3 The Committee then considered and discussed the sections of the Work Programme and specifically the following:

- Under Protect 5, members asked that the paper presented to Lord Gardiner at the New Forest Show setting out the benefits delivered by the New Forest Commoners and farmers be circulated to all members for information.

Action: Paul Walton to circulate to all members the paper presented to Lord Gardiner at the New Forest Show setting out the benefits delivered by the New Forest Commoners and farmers.

- Members commented on Protect 7 with regard to the Green Halo Partnership and noted that a clear message needed to be communicated to the public about the Green Halo project and the work being done by the Partnership.
- On Protect 11 (traditional building skills), members felt that the value of the training courses could be enhanced by the issuing of a certificate confirming participation on the course and what training was involved. Similarly (under scheduled and unscheduled ancient monuments), members felt that a priority list of the most important New Forest monuments could be compiled and publicised to raise the profile of these sites.
- Under Enjoy 11 (review of Recreation Management Strategy), members thanked Nigel Matthews and his team for their efforts in taking forward the 'call for views' consultation and the significant task of analysing the responses received.
- A general comment expressed by members in considering Prosper 2 (Superfast broadband roll out) was that progress reported in the work programme should identify those projects where the NPA undertakes a facilitative role and has little or no direct control over the achievement of the project. Officers should also acknowledge insufficient progress made against an action of this type by registering an amber risk status against the action/s concerned and providing an explanation to assist the Committee in understanding the Authority's role in the project and deciding on possible corrective action and/or mitigation. This would also apply in instances where the Authority was the lead partner as members appreciated an acknowledgment early on that measures needed to be taken to bring an NPA project back on track.
- In considering Prosper 5 (New Forest Tour – decrease in overall passenger numbers) members felt that the risk status should have been amber rather than green. Members also noted that the reduction in the tour season had been an operational decision taken by the bus operator and was an example of the Authority's facilitative rather than management role. In response to a query, members were advised that the loss of income from the current reduced season would be covered by previous years' income where a surplus had been recorded.
- Members discussed the Woodfuel Productivity programme (Prosper 7) and were advised that there was a general unwillingness by larger users such as hotels and care homes to invest in large scale woodfuel installations and their focus was on fuel sources requiring a lower level of capital investment. There was therefore a risk that the EM3 grant funding would not be taken up in the New Forest. However, officers would continue with their work on developing a network of woodland owners and woodfuel suppliers and promote this source of fuel to large scale users. They would also make

application for the continuation of the grant to March 2019 when the current grant came to an end in March 2018.

- Under Achieving Excellence 4 (specialist advice through shared services) members asked that officers ensured that NPA work was not detrimentally affected through the provision of services under service level agreements and asked that a suitable risk on the value of SLA's be included in the Authority's risk register.

7.4 Members then noted the report.

8. First Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2017-18

8.1 Nigel Stone explained that the figures contained within the report included the position to the end of July and not just quarter one. He drew Members' attention to section 2 which contained the current income and expenditure position, which was broadly as would be expected for the time of year.

8.2 Mr Stone stated that no specific savings had been identified at this time but that the small underspends on each budget line would normally add up to a £5,000 to £10,000 saving by the end of the year. He informed the Committee that salaries were usually budgeted at 98% because there were always periods of time throughout the year where vacancies occurred and savings accrued, however this year there were an unusually high number of staff on maternity leave and the cover for these posts had put pressure on the salary budget. Mr Stone reminded Members that the Our Past Our Future Project (OPOF) still had a shortfall of around £70,000 in match funding and that there was a potential that the Authority might be asked for some funding towards this shortfall. He reassured Members that all partners are equally liable for the shortfall so it would not fall to the Authority to find the full amount.

8.3 In response to a question Mr Stone explained that the expenditure for the replacement ranger van which was currently shown as in the Programme Fund in Annex 3 would be moved to a capital item at the end of the year.

8.4 Members noted the income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified.

9. External Audit - Tender Process

9.1 Nigel Stone reminded Members that that in January 2017 the Authority agreed to procure its future external auditors through a process established by the Local Government Association (LGA) and to be run by Public Sector Audit appointments Ltd (PSAA). He explained that the authority had recently received correspondence from PSAA which proposed the appointment of Ernst and Young as external auditors for five years from 2018/19. Mr Stone pointed out that the exact cost of the service was not yet known but that it was anticipated that as a result of the tender process a reduction in fees of up to 18% was possible.

9.2 Mr Stone informed the Committee that the Authority were being asked to either confirm

their acceptance of the proposed appointment or to provide representations as to why we object to the appointment. Mr Stone stated that neither he nor the Chief Executive were aware of any reason(s) to object to the appointment of Ernst and Young.

Resolved that, the outcome of the agreed PSAA auditor procurement process be noted, including the proposal to appoint Ernst and Young LLP as the Authority's external auditors for a five year period from 2018/19.

10. New Forest Centre Annual Report

- 10.1 Nigel Matthews introduced the report which had been prepared by Hilary Marshall, Centre Manager at the New Forest Centre and summarised the activities at the centre during 2016/17. He reminded Members that the Authority currently provides a grant of £40,000 per year to the Ninth Centenary Trust to support its work at the New Forest Centre.
- 10.2 Marian Spain commented that she felt that the centre needed to be more like a national park information centre and asked to what extent the Authority could influence the layout and shop area. Nigel Matthews explained that the Executive Management Group had been discussing how the Centre looks and that they hoped to receive some lottery funding to redevelop it to make it a great place to start your visit to the New Forest. Mr Matthews also pointed out that the centre management considered that this summer's Travel Ambassador Service had been an invaluable addition to the provision.
- 10.3 Members agreed that there was a wider debate to be had about how and where we answer visitors' questions, pointing out that if a visitor arrives by train in Brockenhurst or Ashurst they need to travel to Lyndhurst to make use of the Centre and that there was a need to establish how successful the travel concierge service was in terms of New Forest Tour ticket sales.
- 10.4 It was recommended that members carry out a 'mystery shopper' type visit to the centre to establish for themselves what visitor information was available and how knowledgeable the staff are in assisting them with providing information. Nigel Matthews commented that it was important to remember that the New Forest Centre could not pick up everything that the New Forest District Council used to undertake before they closed the tourist information point at the Centre.
- 10.5 Members noted the report.

11. Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy - *Withdrawn*

- 11.1 This agenda item was withdrawn before the meeting because officers required more time to consider comments received by the Trade Union in response to the proposed amendments. It is anticipated the report will now be considered at the next meeting in November.

12. Corporate Risk Log

- 12.1 David Stone introduced the report and reminded Members that it was considered at every Executive Board Meeting. He drew the Committee's attention to the last item, which was a new risk, regarding the significant number of recently appointed Authority Members and the potential impact on effective decision making if they were not sufficiently engaged in the Authority's work.
- 12.2 Under the Enjoy section Members were concerned that instances of bad behaviour, such as dropping litter, petting ponies, BBQs on the open forest, poor parking etc had been more prevalent this summer and that risk 5 should be amber and not green, to reflect this concern. Alison Barnes commented that classifying a risk as amber or red highlighted it as an area that required staff input and resource and that she would remind officers that they should not be reluctant to increase risks classifications.
- 12.3 Commenting on risk 20, failure to influence policy makers at national and regional level, Members expressed concern with regards to our neighbouring authorities and the amount of development occurring on our boundaries. Steve Avery informed Members that he was working with the South Downs National Park to influence Hampshire County Council's policies, given that 30% of Hampshire lies within in the two national parks.
- 12.4 Officers agreed to consider the matters raised and amend as appropriate the Risk Log. Members noted the Risk Log.

13 Business Plan

- 13.1 Holger Schiller gave an oral update of progress made to date on the new Business Plan. He explained that he had involved staff in setting the foundations of the new Business Plan through a number of interactive sessions. He was pleased to report that engagement was high and that over 100 issues had been raised in the sessions and they had covered a wide variety of topics including organisational matters, communications and project management.
- 13.2 He explained that the next steps were for Executive Management Team (ELT) to organise thematic sessions with staff towards the end of October to establish the content, with each member of ELT working on one of the work programme areas; Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Achieving Excellence. There would also be a Member and Staff combined session.
- 13.3 Mr Schiller stated that he would bring regular updates to the Committee and that a final draft would be considered by the full Authority at its meeting in March 2018.

14. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

- 14.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

15. Date of next meeting

15.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 13 November 2017 at 10.00 hours at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 12.50 hours

Signed
(Chairman)

Date.....